

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5293

INFO AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 1664

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, AS, CB

SUBJ: EVACUATION OF AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY

REF: CANBERRA 1581

1. AT MEETING WITH DEPT ASST SECRETARY ZURHELLEN MAR 14 AUSTRALIAN SECRETARY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS ALAN RENOUF BEGAN CONVERSATION BY REFERRING TO GOA DECISION TO EVACUATE AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY PHNOM PENH. HE SAID HE WANTED TO MAKE CLEAR THAT DECISION HAD NO RPT NO ANTI-AMERICAN SLANT TO IT, NOR WAS IT INTENDED TO EMBARRASS U.S. IN ANY WAY. HE SAID GOA CONCERN WAS IMPLY BASED ON CONSIDERATION THAT, WITH PHNOM PENH NOW BEING SHELLED AND ROCKETED DAILY, ONE ROUND MIGHT FALL ON AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY OR RESIDENCE OF AUSTRALIAN STAFF MEMBER AND NEEDLESS CASUALTIES MIGHT OCCUR, WHEN MOST OF STAFF EFFECTIVELY UNABLE TO PERFORM NORMAL TASKS.

2. RENOUF SAID THAT ONE ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATION IN EVACUATING EMBASSY; WAS DESIRE OF PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM TO USE AUSTRALIAN FIXED WING AIRCRAFT FOR EVACUATION RATHER THAN DEPEND ON U.S. FACILITES. FIXED-WING AIRCRAFT REQUIRE USE OF POCHENTONG AIRPORT, WHOSE SECURITY REMAINS UNCERTAIN.

3. IN REPLY ZURHELLEN EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR INFORMATION AND ADDED THAT, OF COURSE, DECISION TO EVACUATE EMBASSY WAS MATTER FOR GOA TO RESOLVE IN ACCORDANCE WITH ITS OWN
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EVALUATION OF SITUATION. U.S. EMBASSY REMAINING IN PLACE

AS THINGS PRESENTLY STAND. ZURHELLEN CONCLUDED BY SAYING THAT WE HOPE THAT AMERICAN EMBASSY WILL STILL BE IN PLACE IN PHNOM PENH AND BE ABLE TO WELCOME AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY BACK WHEN AUSTRALIANS RETURN.

4. COMMENT: REASON GIVEN FOR EVACUATION BY RENOUR (I.E., POSSIBILITY OF AUSTRALIAN CASUALTIES FROM ROCKET AND ARTILLERY FIRE) IS DIFFERENT FROM THAT GIVEN BY INDO-CHINA DESK OFFICERS (REFTEL), WHO EXPRESSED CONCERN FOR SECURE EVACUATION OF FILES AND COMMO EQUIPMENT. RENOUF'S REFERENCE TO USE OF AUSTRALIAN AIRCRAFT (NECESSARILY FIXED-WING) RATHER THAN DEPEND ON U.S. AIRCRAFT (WHICH COULD INCLUDE HELICOPTERS) PROBABLY REFLECTS WHITLAM'S DETERMINATION TO APPEAR TO BE INDEPENDENT OF U.S. RENOUF'S EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER POSSIBLE AUSTRALIAN CASUALTIES IN PHNOM PENH IS SAME AS THAT EXPRESSED TO EMBASSY OVER PAST TWO YEARS BY DFA. THERE IS NO BASIS FOR QUESTIONING RENOUF'S SINCERITY IN EMPHASIZING THAT THERE IS NO ANTI-AMERICAN SLANT TO DECISION TO EVACUATE AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY IN PHNOM PENH. HOWEVER, AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF AUSTRALIAN POLICY IN CAMBODIA FOR PAST TWO YEARS OR SO, A SIGNIFICANT ELEMENT IN WHITLAM'S GOA DECISION TO EVACUATE EMBASSY WAS PROBABLY DESIRE TO HASTEN COURSE OF EVENTS WHICH GOA PROBABLY BELIEVES WILL INEVITABLY HAPPEN IN ANY CASE.
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